HOLIDAY GUIDE

The Guardian's Ultimate Guide to the Holidays



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Think global, shop local

Funny how quickly this holiday season has snuck up on us, isn't it? That election sure was distracting. Here's hoping our ultimate holiday gift guide can help you navigate these next few months while you're busy celebrating President Obama and protesting Prop. 8. Speaking of politics, the Guardian *has joined a national effort to support local businesses this year as a way to boost our economy. Read Tim Redmond's explanation below. May it be a holiday season of change!*

Molly Freedenberg
Holiday Guide editor

It's so easy to shop online. And it's easy to go to a big chain store and pick up all your bargains in one place. And in the end, what does it get you?

Not that much.

San Francisco is full of neighborhoods that are full of locally-owned, independent businesses. They're part of the flavor of the city, part of the reason we all live here. Their taxes pay for libraries and parks and schools. Their owners are active in the community, hiring local people and keeping the streets alive. And they exist only because people shop there.

When you shop locally, you get a lot more. "When you shop online, your money could be going across the Earth," explained Marc Caposino, managing partner of Fresh Public, a marketing firm that has a city contract to promote local shopping. "The character of our neighborhoods is based on local shopping, and if we don't pay attention to that, we'll lose it."

You also do a lot to help the economy in this deepening recession. Every dollar you spend in a locally-owned business circulates through the local economy; the local bookstore owner takes the money and spends it at the local shoe store, where the owner spends it at a local restaurant — and all that helps the recovery. If you spend the same dollar at a chain store or shopping online, the profits are whisked out of town instantly.

The numbers are pretty dramatic. Based on an analysis provided by the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, using a formula created by the consulting firm Civic Economics, if every one of the *Guardian*'s 593,000 readers spends $100 of their holiday money shopping at a local business, that would inject $99 million into the San Francisco economy. That's nearly $15 million more dollars than we would see if that money was spent in chain stores.

The *Guardian* is part of a national shop-local campaign, coordinated through the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies. The city of San Francisco has a shop-local effort too, as does Oakland. Many other cities are picking up the theme.

And it's not as if you have to give up anything. I learned long ago that most local bookstores can offer the same service as Amazon.com. If you want a book your local independent store doesn't carry, the folks there can order it for you and get it just as fast as Amazon can — and you won't even pay shipping charges. "If you're looking for something specific, you can probably get it somewhere in San Francisco," Caposino said. It's worth a few minutes to look.
(Tim Redmond)

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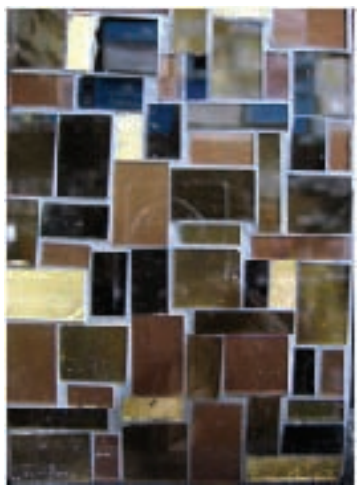
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HOLIDAY GUIDE



GUILT-FREE GIFTS



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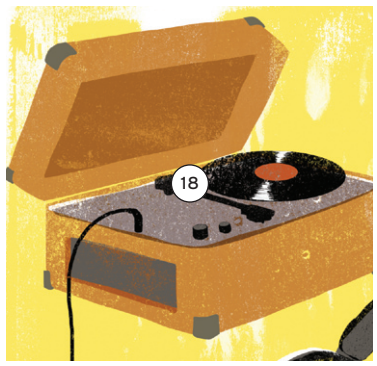
GRAPHIC GIFTS



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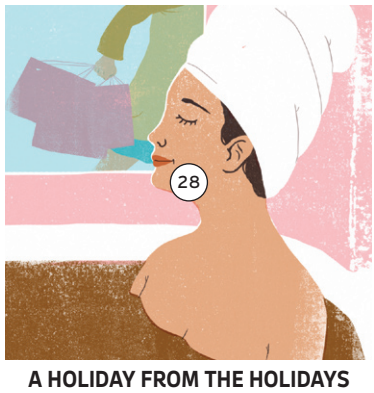
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A HOLIDAY FROM THE HOLIDAYS

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Guilt-free gifts

A guide to supporting good causes

By Katie Baker
› culture@sfbg.com

It's that time of year again: stores are hanging up wreaths of holly, people are stringing Christmas lights and taking their menorahs out of storage, and you're scrambling around the city, without enough money or time, trying to find the perfect gift for everyone on your list and cursing mindless consumption. Before you renounce all things holiday themed and decide to hide under the covers until January, though, check out our ideas below, which include small local businesses, nonprofits, charities, and other organizations that give back to society. As corny as it sounds, by shopping at any of the places listed below, you're not just giving to your friends and family, you're giving to the community as a whole — while reducing your own consumerist guilt. And after all, isn't feeling good about giving what the holidays are really all about? (Well, that and copious amounts of eggnog.)

FROG HOLLOW FARM

If you love supporting local farmers but hate jostling your way through the crowds at the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, why not order a package of Black Forest ham and Gruyère turnovers ($24 for six) or a seasonal fruit sampler ($38 for six pounds of hand-selected fruit) straight from Frog Hollow Farm's Web site? An organic farm just an hour outside San Francisco, Frog Hollow will ship baskets of fresh fruit, olive oil, chutneys, and pastries to whoever your lucky recipient may be — a friend, a family member, or even just you (now that I know I can get cherry galettes and pear, Gorgonzola, and walnut tartlets delivered straight to my house, I'm not sure I'll have enough money to send any packages out this year). Plus, this way you won't feel guilty for forgetting to bring your reusable canvas bag to the market, *again*.
www.froghollow.com

SAN FRANCISCO ZOO

Don't lie: your childhood dream of having an elephant or a monkey for a pet never completely went away. Unfortunately, it's illegal in the state of California to own such exotic animals, but that doesn't mean you can't adopt! The San Francisco Zoo offers Adopt-an-Animal gift certificates, which include a personalized certificate, a framed photo, information about your adoptee, and an invitation for two to the zoo's annual Zoo Parent Day. The recipient gets to select his or her own animal, with options ranging from the traditional (polar bear, alligator, penguin) to the unique (laughing kookaburra, Nigerian dwarf goat, Mexican red-kneed tarantula) to the endangered (snow leopard, Magellanic penguin, Siberian tiger). All animal adoptions cost $50, which helps support all zoo residents of that species for a year.
(415) 753-7117, www.sfzoo.org

CREATIVITY EXPLORED'S ANNUAL HOLIDAY ART SALE

If you're gifting an art lover but lack the cash to buy a piece from an expensive gallery, visit the Annual Holiday Art Sale at Creativity Explored, San Francisco's premier gallery showing work by artists with developmental disabilities. These virtuosos, whose work has been called some of the most imaginative, original, and sophisticated art in San Francisco, include not only painters and sculptors but also T-shirt designers and pillow makers. And even if you have less than 10 bucks to spend, you'll walk away with something special. Check out the selection of blank note cards, which come in sets of six or eight, cost between $7 and $12, and have names like "San Francisco Icons," "The Sky Is Falling," and "Bottlecap Ferris Wheel." Half of the proceeds go directly to the artist, so no need to feel guilty when you tell your significant other that his or her new piece of artwork is "priceless" — it may have been cheap, but it was for a great cause.



GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

Dec. 5–30. Opening-weekend hours: Dec. 5, 6–9 p.m.; Dec. 6–7, 1–6 p.m. Regular gallery hours: Mon.–Fri., 10 a.m.–3 p.m.; Sat., 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Creativity Explored, 3245 16th St., SF. (415) 863-2108, www.creativityexplored.org

KITTINHAWK

Everyone has that one annoyingly hip fashionista friend who's impossible to shop for. Surprise yours this holiday season with a piece of jewelry from Kittinhawk, a one-of-a-kind clothing and jewelry line handmade from vintage and recycled materials. Designer Allysun Dutra describes her wares as perfect for "people who love to be extravagant and fancy while still being conscious of the environment." Whether you decide on a pair of dangly feathered earrings, a choker adorned with pearls and vintage keys, or a whimsical charm bracelet, there's no doubt it will be your friend's favorite new statement piece.

Bell Jar, 187 16th St., S.F. (415) 626-1749, www.kittinhawk.com

ECO HOLIDAY SF

As painful as shopping malls are during the holidays, there's something to be said for the convenience of doing all your gift buying under one roof. Still, who wants to deal with pushy fellow shoppers, corny decorations, and gross food court cuisine? This year, check out the first annual Eco Holiday SF, presented by the Urban Alliance for Sustainability, a nonprofit co-op in San Francisco. This localism extravaganza (all products will be from within 100 miles of the city) will offer items like earth-friendly RocknSocks slippers, handmade jewelry, and organic fair-trade chocolate truffles. The celebration will also feature the Bio-Shuttle, a bus service to and from BART; valet bike parking; "healing spaces"; healthy food; and cocktails. Hopefully some Macy's representatives can drop by and take a tip or two.

Dec. 14, 11:11 a.m.–8:08 p.m., the Galleria, San Francisco Design Center, 101 Henry Adams, S.F. (415) 255-8411, www.ecoholidaysf.com

MARRIAGE EQUALITY USA; HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

Show your opposition to the passing of Proposition 8 by giving your loved ones marriage-equality–themed presents this holiday season. Oakland-based Marriage Equality USA will be selling holiday CDs ($20) featuring slightly altered versions of your seasonal favorites. Expect lyrics like "Wedding bells ring / Are you listening / No more second class citizens, / We're happy tonight / Our goal is in sight / 1,100 federal marriage rights." Order the CD on the Web site or stop by Union Square, where MEUSA employees will be caroling throughout the holiday season. You can also pick up locally made equality- and Castro Disrict-themed T-shirts, as well as Christopher Radko–designed holiday ornaments, at the Human Rights Campaign's San Francisco store. Regardless of what gift you choose, your money will be going to a great and important cause.

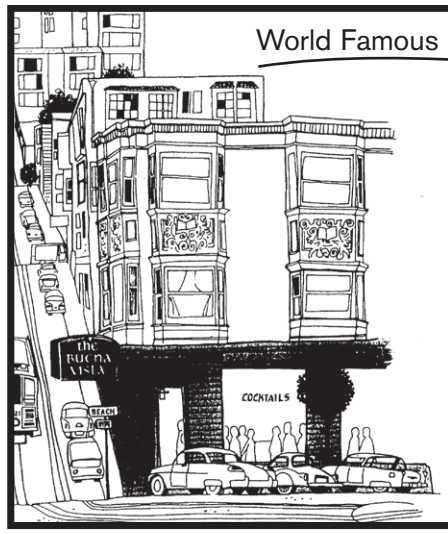
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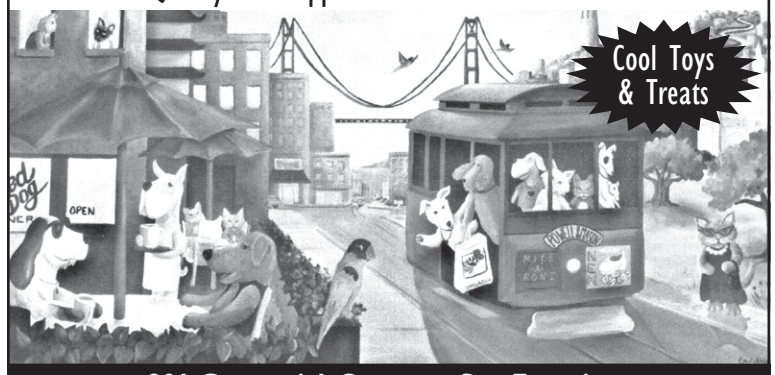


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HEAD BANGIN'

Have a friend who's too much metal for one man (or woman)? Get one of these gifts, sure to inspire devil horns and a big, snarling smile.

1. Black Cobra T-shirt ($12), www.blackcobraa.net; 2. Hammers Of Misfortune T-shirt ($13), www.hammersofmisfortune.com; 3. Leather-studded belt ($19.98), Cal Surplus, 1541 Haight, SF. (415) 861-0404; 4. Leather Cuffs ($75 each), Daljeet's, 1773 Haight, SF. (415) 668-8500, www.daljeets.com; 5. Metalacolypse Season II: Black Fire Upon Us DVD ($29.98), www.adultswim.com; 6. Cannibal Corpse women's underwear ($15), Shaxul Records, 1816 Haight, SF. www.shaxulrecords.com; 7. iPod Touch 8GB ($229), Apple, 1 Stockton, SF. (415) 392-0202, www.apple.com; 8. Cannibal Corpse giant patch ($10), Shaxul Records, 1816 Haight, SF. www.shaxulrecords.com; 9. Reverend Daredevil 290 guitar ($499), SF Guitarworks, 331 Potrero, SF.(415) 865-5424, www.sfguitarworks.com; 10. Testament T-shirt ($20), www.testamentlegions.com

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ARLENE ROMANA

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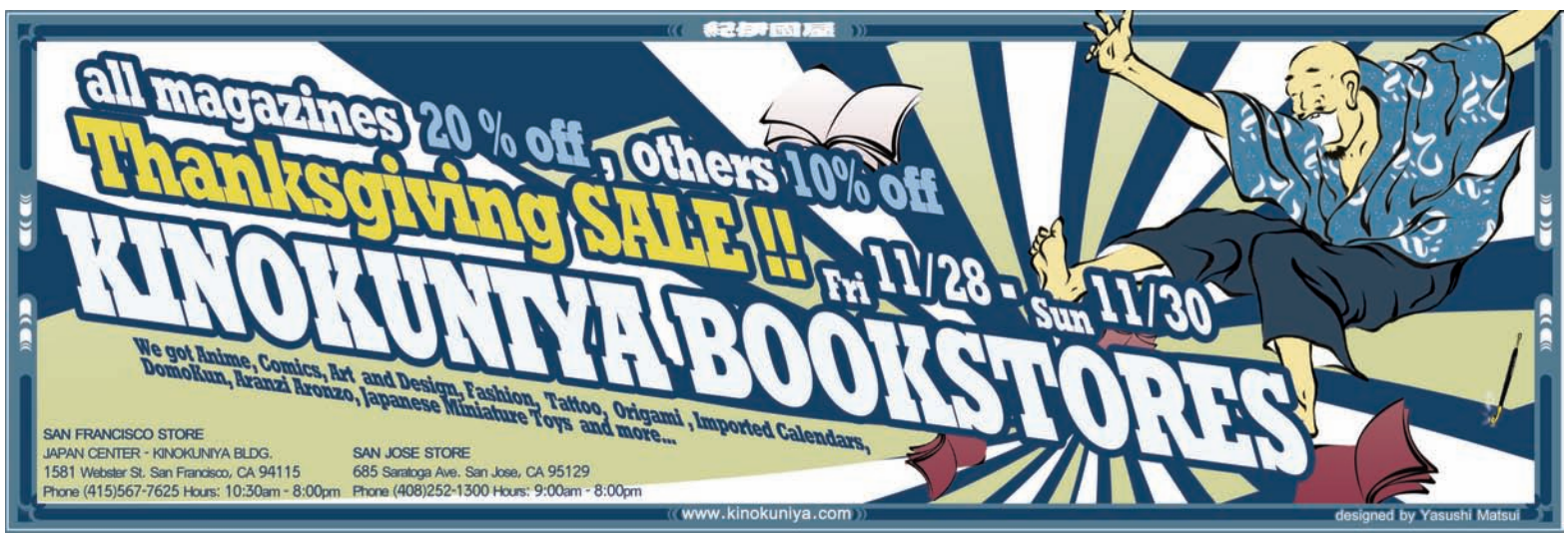
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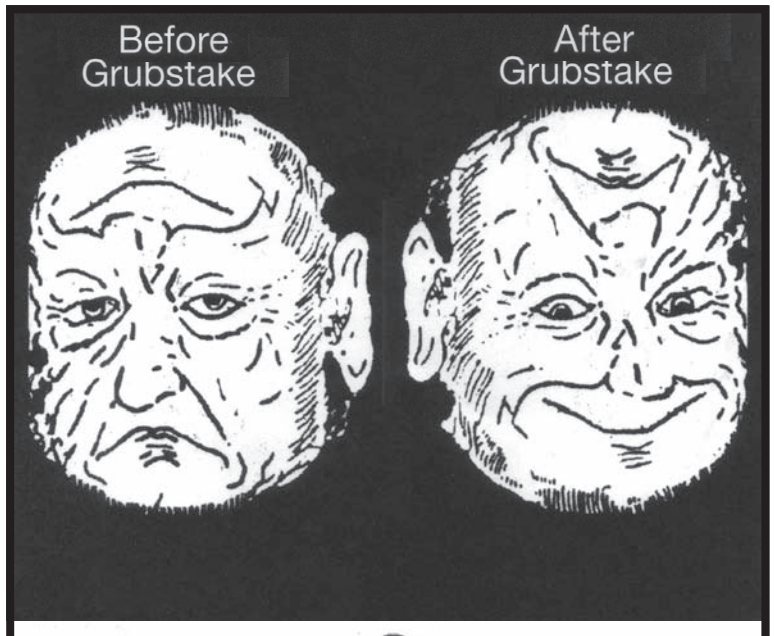
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GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

Graphic gifts

Epic comics to warm the cockles of your loved ones' twisted hearts

By Justin Hall
› culture@sfbg.com

Unless you've been living under a rock, you're aware that the last few years have seen an impressive flowering of graphic novels and comic book art. These days, every self-respecting, well-read person should have a graphic novel or two on the shelf — and that makes this the perfect moment to give your fave loved one a comic as a holiday gift.

FOR THE SMARTY-PANTS IN UNDEROOS

Watchmen changed the world of comic books when it debuted in 1986, ushering in an era of more serious and ambitious storytelling. Written by the revered Alan Moore, *Watchmen* uses the trope of superheroes to examine American culture. It won the Hugo Award that year (the first time a comic book had ever won a major literary award in America), was later named one of *Time* magazine's Best 100 Books of All Time (the only comic book on the list), and is now being made into an movie. *Watchmen* dissects the superhero, revealing the elements of fascism, nihilism, and sexual obsession inherent in the genre, while always maintaining a sense of empathy for its characters' humanity. It is beautiful and profoundly moving.

Watchmen: The Absolute Edition (DC Comics, 2008, 436 pages, $39.99) is a magnificent large-format reissue that beautifully shows off illustrator Dave Gibbon's meticulous art, is completely re-colored, and has plenty of additional material. This is something that any geek would be proud to own.

FOR THE TWEEN WHO STILL BELIEVES IN MAGIC

Forget Harry Potter, ***Bone*** (Cartoon Books, 2004, 1300 pages, $39.95) is the bomb! Jeff Smith's magnum opus is something truly rare in comics — a fully realized, all-ages fantasy story that balances thrilling adventure, humor, and lovable characters that develop and grow.

Three cousins stumble into a new land complete with dragons, a super-strong grandma, a princess with a destiny, a terrifying lord of locusts, and stupid rat creatures. As in the Harry Potter series, *Bone* becomes darker and more serious as the story progresses, but it never loses a delightful playfulness, both in the moments of comic relief and in Smith's light, masterful brushwork. *Bone* can be found either as a single volume in its original black-and-white form, or as a set of color books from Scholastic Press.

FOR SCI-FI FANS WITH POST-APOCALYPTIC DAYDREAMS

Perhaps the best science fiction comic book ever produced starts off the way the best sci-fi stories do, with a simple premise that creates a ripple-effect of expanding consequences. In ***Y: The Last Man***, all the males on the planet except for two die off from a sudden, horrifying plague, leaving poor Yorick and his pet monkey Ampersand the last creatures alive with Y chromosomes.

Writer Brian K. Vaughn, one of the best of a new generation of comics writers and one of the principle writers for TV's *Lost*, cut his teeth creating the *Y* saga, which has been seeping out in one-volume installments since 2003. He imagines a world without men in fascinating ways, but never lets the setting get in the way of a gripping, fast-paced story. Pia Guerra's art is competent and engaging, and propels the story along at the same clip as the writing. The entire breathtaking story comes in 10 softcover volumes from publisher Vertigo for around $13–$15 each. A just-published comprehensive deluxe edition (Vertigo, 2008, 256 pages, $29.99) comprises the first five volumes, with the second installation scheduled to come out in May 2009.

FOR TORTURED, BEAUTIFUL SOULS

There is a long, venerable history to comics biographies and autobiographies, from Art Spiegleman's *Maus* to Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (fabulous gifts all). I want, however, to point out an often-overlooked book that deserves its place in the canon, Phoebe Gloeckner's ***Diary of a Teenage Girl*** (Frog Books, 2002, 312 pages, $22.95), which is one of the most compelling accounts of a troubled childhood that I've ever read.

Diary is not just a comic book. It weaves together graphic chapters with diary-form prose and illustrations to tell the story of Minnie Goetze, a 15-year-old girl who has an affair with her mother's boyfriend before spiraling downward into drugs and abusive relationships.

It all takes place in 1970s San Francisco, and the city is an integral part of the story, from Minnie's home in a Victorian flat in Laurel Heights to the world of gay hustlers and runaways on Polk Street.

FOR ROCKET-POWERED LOVERS

Have someone on your gift list who loves the magical realism, multigenerational storylines, and fantastic characters of Gabriel García Márquez? How about someone who can't get enough of cool-ass, punk-rock dykes? Well, I have the perfect graphic novels for you: Gilbert Hernandez's ***Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup Stories*** (Fantagraphics, 2003, 512 pages, $39.95), which chronicles the adventures of the denizens of a fictional Central American village, and ***Locas: The Maggie and Hopey Stories*** (Fantagraphics, 2004, 712 pages, $49.95) by Jaime Hernandez, which centers around two punk girls in the Mexican barrios of Los Angeles.

Both collect stories originally serialized in what is arguably the greatest American comic ever produced, *Love and Rockets* (and yes, that's where the band got its name), which has been published since 1981.

FOR EPIC MEDICAL DRAMA QUEENS

Ode to Kirihito (Vertical, 2006, 832 pages, $24.95) will blow your mind. Created in 1969 by the stellar Osama Tezuka, godfather of manga and anime (Japanese comics and cartoons), it was markedly more sophisticated and accomplished than anything coming out of the United States at the time. In fact, American popular culture is only now catching up to Tezuka — we're just now getting translations of his works. Luckily, the new American versions are well designed and nimbly translated.

Kirihito tells the story of a plague that turns people into doglike creatures, and reads like a combination of a medical drama (Tezuka was trained as a physician), a panoramic 19th-century novel, and an existentialist treatise à la Albert Camus. Maybe your loved ones think that manga is all melodramatic kids with big eyes, spiky hair, and cute pets that shoot lightning? *Ode to Kirihito* will expand their view.

FOR YOUR FAVORITE PERVERT

Best Erotic Comics 2008 (Last Gasp, 2008, 200 pages, $19.95) is trying to fill an important, ahem, hole in the world of alternative comics. As the current comics renaissance gains steam, it is becoming curiously less and less sexual. Compared to the wild antics of the underground cartoonists of the 1960s, today's indie comics tend to be flaccid fare.

BEC 2008 aims to change all that, as the first of an annual series of anthologies devoted to showcasing the best of comics erotica and restoring sexuality as a centerpiece of the indie comics sensibility. Last Gasp, a venerable San Francisco–based comics and alt-media publisher and distributor, is putting out the series.

Impressively diverse on all levels, *BEC 2008* features a young dyke's first encounter with a vibrator, a dominatrix who hires a gay masseur to fuck her boyfriend, King Kong and Godzilla getting it on ... there's a little something here for every proud pervert to treasure. That's the magic of the holiday season! SFBG

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Justin Hall is a San Francisco–based comics artist and owner of All Thumbs Press (www.allthumbspress.com).











The game room

Fantastic new releases for computers and consoles

By Daniel N. Alvarez
› culture@sfbg.com



GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

The holidays have always been a time for toys. Back in the day, it was board games, baby dolls, and Rubik's cubes. Then came Nintendo, *Dance Dance Revolution*, and *The Sims*. And now? The world of gaming is exploding, with something for everyone — from sci-fi-loving kids to sports-fanatic adults. Here are a few of our favorite new releases, which are sure to please everyone on your list (except maybe Grandpa):

Spore
Maxis (EA Sports); PC/Mac

"Playing God" just took on a whole new meaning. From Maxis, the people who brought you *The Sims*, comes the genre-defying *Spore*, a game designed for people who are tired of creating boring ol' humans. In its captivating metaverse, gamers create a unicellular organism that must evolve into a social, cognizant creature. Explore the game's expansive, interstellar landscape while developing a whole new species that can live and thrive in a brave new world. If that isn't enough, it features ambient soundscapes by avant-garde composer and producer Brian Eno.

Pro Evolution Soccer 2009
Konami; PS3, Xbox 360, PSP, PS2, Wii, PC

The Pro Evolution Soccer series, also known as *Winning Eleven*, has long been the "Beautiful Games" best-kept gaming secret. While enjoying rampant global popularity, stateside it has long been the Don Swayze to Electronic Arts' FIFA series' Patrick Swayze. Its underwhelming sales in the United States are due to EA's publicity machine and its name recognition. But *PES 2009*'s staggering fluidity, graphics, and realism leaves *FIFA*'s in the dust. While it features the international and club matches we expect, this year's version exclusively features UEFA Champion's League mode, which allows you to navigate through soccer's preeminent club competition that decides the best team in Europe. A majestic sport demands a majestic game, and *Pro Evolution Soccer '09* best captures the nuances and gravity of the world's most beloved sport.

World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
Blizzard Entertainment; PC/ Mac OS X

If you can control an insatiable appetite for the destruction of your social life during the 42 days between its release and St. Nick's World Tour, No. 1 on your shopping list should be the latest installment of the soul-sucking, hypnotic genius of Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft*. While its global fans' limitless dedication risks the ire of parents, teachers, and psychologists (read: party poopers), who confuse persistence and attention to detail with addictive behaviors, Blizzard has simply achieved every video game maker's wet dream. It's crafted a game intriguing and enjoyable enough that both hardcore and weekend warriors want to get in on the action.

Shaun White Snowboarding
Ubisoft; PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, Nintendo DS, PSP, PS2, PC

Not since Tony Hawk has an athlete been able to seamlessly transition from extreme sports star to bona fide sports hero and A-list celebrity like Shaun "the Flying Tomato" White has. He's appeared on countless magazines and talk shows, and is now pulling his own "Tony Hawk" by fronting a big-budget, mainstream video game franchise. While time will tell if *Shaun White Snowboarding* will be as successful as the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater series, but early returns have been overwhelmingly positive. The game features four mountain settings — Alaska, the Alps, Japan, and Park City, Utah — with seemingly endless runs and backcountry trails to get lost on. The game flows well, and there are countless opportunities to do hair-raising tricks and twists. White wanted the game to capture the freedom that made him fall in love with snowboarding, and Ubisoft has captured that perfectly, constantly pushing the user to discover the road less traveled without the possibility of death by hypothermia.

Rock Band 2
Harmonix/ Pi Studios; PS3, Xbox 360 (PS2/Wii releasing December 2008)

I'll be honest with you. There is nothing, but nothing, that can kill a night out quite like *Rock Band*. Speaking from experience, it usually strikes around 11 p.m., when you and your friends are, theoretically, having your last drinks and preparing to brave the San Francisco nightlife. You may have high hopes for the evening. Maybe you'll find a cool new bar, meet some new people, or even engage in a hazy dalliance that hopefully leaves you disease- and child-free in the morning. Then, disaster strikes. Someone asks, "Hey, who wants to play a little *Rock Band* before we go out?" Three hours later, you are wasted, singing "Wanted Dead or Alive" at the top of your lungs, and surrounded by the same four mates you started the night with. Good-bye cool bar, new friends, and Ms. or Mr. Right (Now). The latest version promises even more lost evenings and new opportunities to show off that falsetto, with almost 100 songs from nearly every genre, including classic rock standards (Fleetwood Mac, the Who), a double helping of '90s grunge (Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains), and '80s metal jams (Ratt, Bon Jovi).

Mirror's Edge
Electronic Arts; PS3, Xbox 360

First-person adventure games are the Auto-Tune (T-Pain Effect) of video games, with seemingly every major video game manufacturer using this über-realistic, up-close perspective. That said, *Mirror's Edge* looks likely to revolutionize first-person shooters with its unparalleled gameplay. Players control Faith, the game's tragic hero, on her quest to save her sister from a web of deceit woven by a corrupt communist government. The game's gorgeous, illuminated metropolitan setting demonstrates its elite graphics, but the real attraction lies in Faith's ambitious journey. While fighting is involved, the user must navigate the expansive urban labyrinth and find ways to infiltrate the totalitarian regime. Though it boasts more action (read: combat) than most RPG's, *Mirror's Edge* is not a game for the unreceptive, lazy gamer who simply wants to blow shit up. But if you like using your brain as well as your bullets, you will rejoice in its complex storyline, nuance, and overall gameplay.

NBA Live '09
Electronic Arts; Xbox 360, Wii, PS3, PS2, PSP

Without the mighty Baron Davis, how are the hapless Warriors going to make the playoffs? Easy. Pick up a copy of EA's new installment of the NBA Live juggernaut, make a few shrewd trades such as swapping Al Harrington and C.J. Watson for Carlos Boozer and Deron Williams (that's fair, right?), start up your season, and voilà! The Warriors go 73-9, break the Bulls all-time record, cruise into the playoffs, and crush the overmatched Boston Celtics to bring the Bay Area their first title since 1975. Meanwhile, the villainous Utah Jazz are sent tumbling to an abysmal 5-77 mark (guess who's still bitter about the '07 playoffs?). Along the way, enjoy graphics clear enough to make out Kenyon Martin's impressive array of neck tats, high-flying dunks more exciting than a moped ride with Monta Ellis, and gameplay so realistic that while playing as the Knicks, you'll be too lazy to get back on defense. SFBG

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Burner Bourgeois

Forget faux fur coats and moon boots this year. The modern burner's wish list is all about deconstructed leather, tribal jewelry, and Mad Max-meets-newsboy style.

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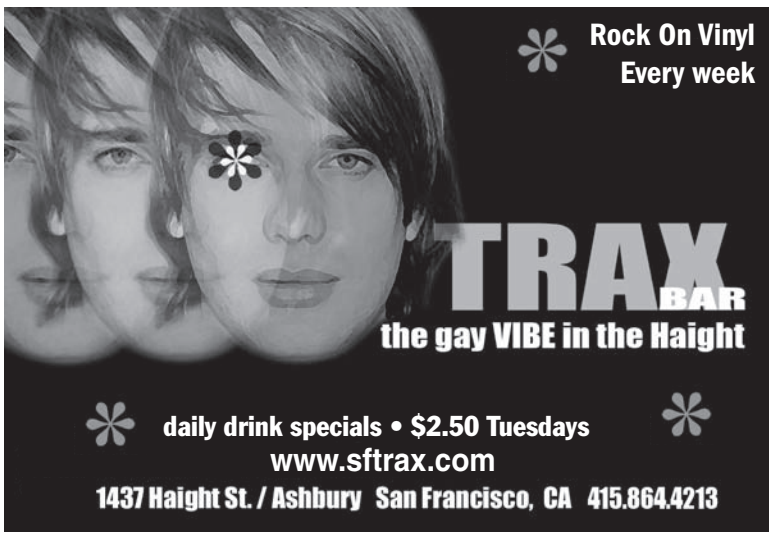
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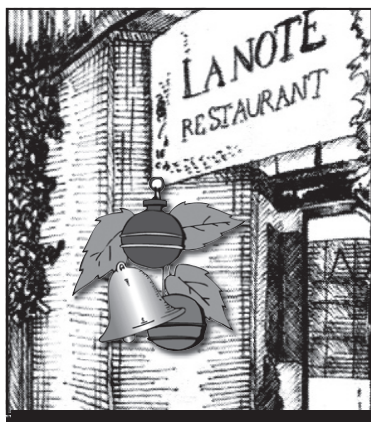
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GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

Seasonal sounds

Sifting through the year's albums and shows for melodic gifting

By Brandon Bussolini
› culture@sfbg.com

Thanks to the continued explosion of musically-oriented Web sites and blogs, you'll probably be even more inundated than usual this year with "best of 2008" lists come January 2009 — far too late for your tuneful shopping needs. So we're cranking one out early, organized by affinity groups — some slightly imaginary, some more concrete — in an attempt to cut through the loud hype and scattered bombast while amping up your gift-giving options. At the end is a suggested list of delectable upcoming live shows, if you're more ticket-oriented.

FOR THE RETRO-FUTURIST DISCO HEAD

Electronic music is a good example of how griping about the state of a scene can sometimes release unexpected creativity. **Syclops**, nominally a Finnish fusion trio, is the latest we've heard from Maurice Fulton since his quasi-breakthrough electro-spazz project Mu. *I've Got My Eye on You* is the longest in a line of pretty epic wins for the label DFA and for electronic music generally: radiating out from "Where's Jason's K," the 10 tracks that make up the album tear ass from pharma'd-out Detroit techno to dreamy, lush deep space jazz.

Also: **Shed**'s *Shedding the Past* (Ostgut Tontrāger) if your giftee's the type who longs for the halcyon days of high minimal glitch; **Nôze**, *Songs on the Rocks* (Get Physical) if his or her affection for tech house precision is matched only by a love of closing-time sing-alongs and Waitsian growls.

FOR LONG-LIMBED INDIE SCRAPPERS

It would be hard to write enough about "Black Rice," the best song on Canadian indie quartet **Women**'s self-titled debut on Jagjaguwar. Starting from an absurdly unambitious guitar line, the song blossoms into something wildly and fiercely beautiful. It could be the impossible falsetto of the chorus, or the way the rhythm section comes unglued from the vocals and guitar, but the song condenses what makes the rest of the album — noisy, lo-fi interludes and all — so engaging. Everything seems held together provisionally on a song like the heartrending "Shaking Hand," but the chorus snaps into place with rubber-banded eagerness.

Also: **Abe Vigoda**'s *Skeleton* (PPM) for its irrepressible youthful longing and controlled thrash; **Benoît Pioulard**'s *Temper* (Kranky) for twining the threads of noise and surprisingly pretty, almost adult-contemporary songwriting into a neither/nor album that's perfect for gray days.

WEIRDOS ONLY

Although more structured than anything they've done before, *Saint Dymphna* (Social Registry), the newest long player from New York's mystical vibe crew **Gang Gang Dance**, still arrives packed with the otherworldliness that characterized its excellent predecessor, *God's Money* (Social Registry, 2005). Three years in the

making, the album itself is nothing if not well paced: the transitions between songs and the gradual build of rhythmic energy make it less kin to trad rock albums than to DJ mixes. When the swells crest, as on "First Communion" and "House Jam," electronic gurgles and processed sounds that might otherwise sound like trying too hard are transformed into pure pith: they're as inviting and faceted as a just-split pomegranate.

Also: **Paavoharju**'s *Laulu Laakson Kukista* (Fonal), since these Finnish folksters cover the dance floor with silt on "Kevätrumpu," bust some desperate torch techno on "Uskallan," and spend a number of other tracks sounding stuck between pagan classical radio and deteriorating field recordings; **Rings** is a trio of new primitives formerly known as First Nation — on *Black Habit* (Paw Tracks), the outfit sounds like it's gotten into the Slits' basements and started making music dictated from beyond.

POST-HIP-HOP BASS SEMANTICS

A DJ mix that stands alone as an album is a rare thing, but leave it to Jace Clayton, a.k.a. **DJ/rupture**, to make one, as he has with *Uproot* (Agriculture). Deeply, er, rooted in the bass plate tectonics of dubstep and cut with the finest in eclectic samples, ranging from experimentalist Ekkehard Ehlers to lazer bass don Ghislain Poirier, *Uproot* rolls deep with dubbed-out ambience, but DJ/rupture is just as happy to turn things upside down, as when he plunks down Ehlers' gorgeous string loop, "Plays John Cassavetes, Pt. 2," around the mix's halfway point. And if bangers of the future don't sound like "Gave You All My Love (Matt Shadetek's I Gave You All My Dub Remix)," which subs out dub's organic space for Fisher-Price primary-color contrasts that split the brain evenly in two, I'm not sure it's a future worth living in.

Also: for the more historically minded, **Ragga Twins** have released *Step Out!* (Soul Jazz), a retrospective that collects the work of a duo widely considered to be the inventors of that dubstep ancestor, jungle; *Tank Thong Mixtape* (Weaponshouse) by **Megasoid** happens to be free, so spend some money on a nice CD-R, decorate it with glitter, and watch exasperation turn to glee when your loved one blows out his or her speakers with this beast.

HEAVY STUFF

One of the year's most life-affirming releases comes from a band called **Fucked Up**; its *Chemistry of Common Life* (Matador) is grounded in hardcore, and has hardness to spare, but makes its biggest impact when it lets a flute solo emerge from the tempest. With his basso profundo growl, singer Pink Eyes can sound like he's gargling hot dogs, and harnessed to a song like "Black Albino Bones," with its cooing melody — the closest thing to pop the seven-year-old band has attempted — it makes for an unexpectedly moving juxtaposition. But the group's real skill comes from mining the void left after the tribal affiliations of high school fall away; "Twice Born"'s refrain, "Hands up if you think you're the only one," could be the year's Miranda July–esque rallying cry.

Also: if you're wondering what Mick Barr's been up to post-Ocrilim, the short answer, witnessed on **Krallice**'s *Krallice* (Profound Lore) is black metal; *Peasant* (Level Plane), an all-encompassing slab of darkness by Baton Rouge–based **Thou**, is closer to trad sludge than to the transcendent drone of Sunn 0))), but no less impressively bleak.

SHOWS

The holiday season is not always a great time for shows (other than several *Nutcracker* incarnations), but for folks who want to gift live music this year there are plenty of sonic distractions. On the heels of *Everybody* (Thrill Jockey), its latest bout of sophisticated jazz rock, the eternally springlike **Sea and Cake** will make an appearance at Great American Music Hall just in time to counteract your seasonal affective disorder (Dec. 2, 8 p.m., $20). **Sebastien Tellier** rolls with the Daft Punk posse, so it's no surprise that his music marries spot-on genre mimicry and a native sense of melody; check out the video for "Divine," in which the Beach Boys–meet–Lio jam turns into a global karaoke marathon of Tellier doppelgängers (Mezzanine, Dec. 4, 9 p.m., $15). There's no rest for local workhorses **Tussle** and **Jonas Reinhardt** — they'll be bringing their peculiar hot-cold takes on krauty electronics to the Hemlock Tavern (Dec. 6, 9:30 p.m., $7). And even if her music is not your cup of tea, **Aimee Mann's 3rd annual Christmas Show** should be a nice shot of seasonality in a city that tends to avoid big displays of Christmas spirit; consider it a good sign that Patton Oswalt, the standup comedian most deserving of your attention, will take part (Bimbo's, Dec. 7, 8 p.m., $40). His looks call to mind a peripheral character from *The Catcher in the Rye*, and his preternaturally gentle music is specially designed not to hurt babies' ears, but the earnest beauty **of Jonathan Richman**'s songs might pierce your heart (Great American Music Hall, Dec. 7, 8 p.m., $15). Bearing a post-hardcore pedigree like whoa, San Francisco's own **Crime in Choir** moves gracefully beyond its members' backgrounds — At the Drive-In, the Fucking Champs — into (surprise!) instrumental prog territory (Hemlock Tavern, Dec. 13, 9:30 p.m., $6). SFBG









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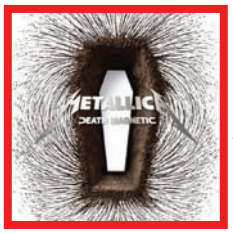
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Amon Amarth Metal Blade
Twilight of the Thunder God
$11.99
Nothing says happy holidays like a cup of egg nog and some good old Norse mythology. Nobody does it better than Amon Amarth! Pair this disc with a sword and viking helmet.



Metallica - *Death Magnetic*
$12.99 Talking House
Bay Area legends return to their thrash roots, resulting in their best album in years. No sword necessary here, but you may need a neck brace afterwards. Critics and fans agree!



The Flaming Lips
Christmas on Mars
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Linkin Park Warner Bros.
Road to Revolution - Live at Milton Keynes **$16.99 cd/dvd**
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Slightly Stoopid Stoopid Records
Chronchitis **$12.99**
Despite the apocalyptic cover, Slightly Stoopid will deliver a green mellow groove to your holiday parties, equal parts rock, reggae and hip-hop, with guests G. Love, Guru and Angelo Moore of Fishbone. Get out the flip-flops and the beer cozies and hang out under the mistetoe.



A Foggy Holiday
Carols from the SF Scene vol. 2
$9.99 Talking House
Local SF bands make merry! Lovemakers doing "Melekalikimaka", May Fire doing "Marshmallow World", Heavenly States, Loquat and many more! Send this one to the family back east.



Nickelback Roadrunner
Dark Horse **$12.99**
This time out, Nickelback brought in legendary producer Mutt Lange (of AC/DC fame) to help out, and he makes things rock harder, if that's possible. Good for catharsis, stress relief and rebellious teenagers on your list.



T.I. - *Paper Trail*
$12.99 Atlantic
T.I.'s return to his roots, his first time writing down his lyrics since his beginning, resulted in one of the best rap albums of the year. Maybe the rap lovers on your list have this already, but it's OK to give it to them again, just so you look good.



Paramore Fueled by Ramen
The Final Riot! **$13.99 cd/dvd**
This document of Paramore's whirlwind summer tour brings the earnestness and quality of their music home. Watch this and then decide whether you'd rather play Rock Band or play a real instrument.



Oasis
Dig Out Your Soul
$12.99 Big Brother/Reprise
The newest one from the Gallaghers will have you swaggering and swooning til well into the new year. Oh that's right, you're supposed to buy gifts for *other* people!



Madlib The Beat Konducta
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$11.99 Rapster
Madlib's Beat Konducta persona is like the college professor who keeps digressing, then digressing again until class is over and you go "huh?" ***WLIB*** is awesome. They should make that John Malkovich movie about going into Mdlib's brain.

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1. Velocity Deep V wheelset ($349.99). Valencia Cyclery, 1077 Valencia, SF. (415) 550-6600, www.valenciacyclery.com; 2. D-Structure artist series Josh Mays “I DS SF” ($32). D-Structure, 520 Haight, SF. (415) 252-8601, www.d-structure.com; 3. Oakley Frogskin sunglasses ($110). Aqua Surf Shop, 1742 Haight, SF. (415) 876-2782, www.aquasurfshop.com; 4. Penfield jacket ($92). True Mensπs, 1415 Haight (415) 626-2882, www.trueclothing.net; 5. Vigor helmet ($39.99). Valencia Cyclery, 1077 Valencia, SF. (415) 550-6600, www.valenciacyclery.com; 6. Nicaelly shirt ($110). True Womenπs,1427 Haight, SF. (415) 626-2331, www.trueclothing.net; 7. Solitary earring ($35). Arara, 665 San Jose, SF. (415) 756-5826; 8. Nixon Tribella watch ($60). Aqua Surf Shop, 1742 Haight, SF. (415) 876-2782, www.aquasurfshop.com; 9. Able “Azteca” print ($28). D-Structure, 520 Haight, SF. (415) 252-8601, www.d-structure.com; 10. Luxirie pants ($46). True Women’s,1427 Haight, SF. (415) 626-2331, ww.trueclothing.net; 11. Reebok Pump Omni ($110). Shoe Biz II, 1553 Haight, SF. (415) 861-3933, www.shoebizsf.com; 12. HellaTight “Whities Away” hat ($45). www.hellatight.com; 13. Messenger bag ($130). Timbuk2, 506 Hayes, SF. (415) 252-9860, www.timbuk2.com; 14. Sugino Track crankset ($299.99). Valencia Cyclery, 1077 Valencia, SF. (415) 550-6600, www.valenciacyclery.com; 15. iPod Nano orange 8GB ($149). Apple, 1 Stockton, SF. (415) 392-0202, www.apple.com; 16. Mixed Gauge beanie ($32). HUF, 812 Sutter, SF. (415) 674-3744, www.hufsf.com

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ARLENE ROMANA



GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

Giving on a shoestring

Cheap and DIY ideas for the financially-challenged

By Molly Freedenberg
› culture@sfbg.com

Barack Obama may have won the election and things may be looking up, but now, in post–Election Day reality, certain things are still true: we're stuck with George W. Bush until January. Proposition 8 passed in California. And the economy still sucks. Not to rain on anyone's parade — or water down your big steaming cup of holiday cheer — but things aren't all better yet. Which means that economically, at least, the prospect of gift-giving this season remains daunting — if not impossible — for most of us.

But there's no need to fear. Obama may be our hope for changing the country, but we're hoping this guide to affordable gifts (most $10 and under!) will give you a little hope for Christmas morning or the Hanukkah gift exchange — one that doesn't involve guilt trips (your friends' and families') or credit card debt (yours).

THINKING OF YOU

All great gifts involve a certain ratio of money, time, and thoughtfulness. The more thoughtful the gift, the less money you need to spend. A great example? My cash-strapped friend once got his girlfriend a concert poster for Christmas. Expensive? Hardly. But the poster was from the first concert the two attended together. Similarly, spending a lot of time or effort on a gift can mean as much — if not more — than spending a lot of scrill. I doubt the secondhand corset my sister got me last year cost much up front, but I know that personalizing it with leopard-print fabric, feathers, and red lace took a bunch of work and thought. If you adjust *your* ratio according to your budget, you just might be able to ride the Obama high through New Year's.

For those who are crafty, now's the time to use the skills you've got. Photoshop wizards might consider making a personalized magazine or concert-style poster for loved ones. Those who sew can get bags, clothes, and even shoes from thrift stores and jazz them up with fabric, beads, and iron-on images. If you're more paint- than needle-friendly, find a funky box, vase, or even lampshade and remagine it for your giftee's tastes. In addition to secondhand stores like **Thrift Town** (2101 Mission, SF. 415-861-1132, www.thrifttown.com) and **Out of the Closet** (1600 University, Berk.; 100 Church, SF; 1295 Folsom, SF; 1498 Polk, SF. www.outofthecloset.org), consider stopping by **SCRAP** (801 Toland, SF. 415-647-1746, www.scrap-sf.org) for ideas and supplies.

STEP-BY-STEP

Determined to make something, but don't know how? For Jews and Judeophiles, try making an **incredible edible dreidel**. All you need are Hershey's chocolate kisses, marshmallows, thin pretzel sticks, and peanut butter.

Step 1: Spread a generous amount of peanut butter on the end of a marshmallow. This peanut butter will act as a glue for the next step.

Step 2: Unwrap a kiss and attach it to the peanut butter–glazed side of the marshmallow. This will create the bottom of the dreidel — the part that allows it to spin.

Step 3: On the side of the marshmallow that has thus far remained untouched, take a pretzel stick and press it into the center of the top of the marshmallow. This will create the top handle of the dreidel.

It may not spin very well, but it'll sure be cute!

Another idea is a **real cork board**. Just collect about 30 corks from wine bottles and hot-glue them to any wooden frame. Voilà! Instant wino-chic. Or turn a cheap wooden frame into an **earring holder**. Simply adorn the frame with paint, beads, stickers, glitter or feathers; staple netting to the back of the frame (an old window screen works great!); and attach a picture-hanger to the back for easy wall application. All your giftee need do is attach earrings — both dangly and post styles — to the net, and they're on display for all to see.

SHOP SMART

If you like a crafty feel but don't have the creative touch yourself, there are plenty of local artisans ready to sell you their wares — for much lower prices and with much more flair than you might find at big corporate stores. Some of the best gifts are available over at **Etsy** (www.etsy.com), where you can search for nearby vendors. Our favorites include **SquishySushi** pendants made from recycled Scrabble pieces, **TalkingHands** jewelry in the shape of sign language letters, rings from **contraptions** that are made to look like they've been scarred in battle, and bottlecap necklaces by **recaps**.

If you're shopping *for* a crafter, a great idea is a gift certificate to Noe Knit Flicks at **NoeKnit** (3957 24th St., SF.), which treats him or her to a night of movie-watching and needle-clicking. Other affordable local stops? Stylish marshmallows from **Coco-luxe** (1673 Haight, SF. 415-367-4012, www.coco-luxe.com), Little Mismatched socks from **Sock Heaven** (2801 Leavenworth, SF. 415-563-7327, www.sockheavensf.com), or funky zines from **Needle and Pens** (3253 16th St., SF. 415-255-1534, www.needles-pens.com).

We also love the papers, pens, and tchotchkes at **Kinokuniya Bookstore** (1581 Webster, SF. 415-567-7625, www.kinokuniya.com). You can find all kinds of vintage clothes, jewelry, and other delights at **Alemany Flea Market** (100 Alemany, SF. 415-647-2043), Sundays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. And you can get all kinds of kitchenware goodies — at wholesale prices! — at **Economy Restaurant Fixtures** (1200 Seventh St., SF. 415-626-5611, www.bigtray.com).

Of course, there are tons more places to get cheap gifts in town. This is just a starting point. Neighborhood boutiques, crafts fairs, and art shows are great places to find one-of-a-kind objects that'll not only delight those on your list, but also support our local economy. Used books and CDs are always good for media types. A collection of magazines — perhaps foreign ones from Fog City that might be hard to find otherwise — can be beautiful and cost-effective.

The most important thing to remember is that when trying to give a gift with minimal cash, you should think about the message you want to send. Showing someone they're important to you, important enough to pay attention to, can mean just as much as getting them the *Guitar Hero* for MacBook game they know you've been wanting (hint hint, Mom). And who knows? Maybe next year, Obama will give us a better economy for Christmas. SFBG

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Not your pilgrim's pie

Modern pumpkin desserts for the historically-minded

By Meghan McCloskey
› culture@sfbg.com

For most of us, pumpkin pie is as much an integral part of Thanksgiving as turkey and stuffing. It's been that way since the beginning, when pilgrims included pumpkin-based delights in their harvest meal.

But early versions of the dessert were much harder to come by than our canned puree (or Marie Callender's) variety. The original New Englanders used pumpkins from the American Indians' harvest, of which they received a large share after arriving in Plymouth, Mass., in 1620. They filled pumpkin shells with a mixture of pumpkin, milk, honey, and spices, and baked them in hot ashes to get that puddinglike, orange deliciousness that so many of us crave by mid-November.

Back then every part of the pumpkin was used. Pumpkin seeds were medicine. Mats were made from flattened, dried strips of shell. It even came in handy if you didn't like your freckles or wanted to get rid of a nasty snakebite, or so the pilgrims believed. The early Americans were so infatuated with the fruit (then known as *pompion*) that they even wrote songs about it: "We have pumpkin at morning and pumpkin at noon / If it were not for pumpkins, we would be undone."

These days it's hard to find anyone who uses a pumpkin for anything more than a table decoration or a jack-o'-lantern. But it's just as hard to find someone who'd say that the orange-colored custard tart doesn't belong on the Thanksgiving table. So why argue with tradition? At the very least, you'll be serving up some good, old-fashioned nutrition to your guests, in the form of vitamin A, potassium, and fiber.

Here are some ideas for pumpkin treats, whether they're traditional pies or modern alternatives, store bought or homemade.

MISSION PIE

From the outside, this Mission Street den doesn't look like a place where you'd want to buy a pet mouse, let alone a dessert to feed your loved ones. But stepping inside the café is like opening the door to Oz: bright colors and friendliness offset the tattered exterior. The staff suggests ordering ahead from the rotating menu of five popular holiday pies ($18) if you want a whole one in time for Turkey Day. And believe me, you will. Try a slice ($3.85, or $3.50 to go) with a dollop of chilled whipped cream and a cup of one of their three house-blend coffees. You'll find the pie's as traditional as anything Grandma's ever made for you.
2901 Mission, SF. (415) 282-1500, www.missionpie.com

MIETTE PATISSERIE AND CONFISERIE

It's nutty. It's succulent. And according to my findings, one person can devour the whole thing in a day. Beautifully wrapped in plastic and a pink bow, Miette's pumpkin walnut cake ($14) is a staple dessert for anyone headed to Mom and Dad's for Thanksgiving — but only if you can make it there with some still left on the platter. Not dressed to impress? Oh please, this cake is class-y. It will make up for a tattered sweater or a stained pant leg.
Ferry Building Marketplace, Embarcadero and Market, SF. (415) 837-0300, www.miettecakes.com

CRAVE BAKERY

This avant-garde brand makes completely organic pies from rice milk, free-range eggs, and palm fruit oil — which all taste better than they sound. Plus, everything is wheat free, gluten free, and



GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

casein free, so dessert lovers who are allergic to wheat and dairy can pig out without losing sleep. Pick up an eight-inch pumpkin tart at Whole Foods, Rincon Market, RJ's Market, Rainbow Grocery, Mollie Stones, Le Beau Nob Hill Market, or Andronico's.
(415) 826-7187, www.cravebakery.org

ZANZE'S CHEESECAKE

It's always fun to mix things up. It's even more fun when there's pumpkin cheesecake involved. In my opinion, the cheesecake is a close second to its time-honored counterpart, the pie. And unlike most cheesecakes, Zanze's (6-inch pie, $14; 8-inch, $22; 10-inch, $28) won't weigh you down like a pile of bricks — you'll have a turkey to do that. It's light and carefully whipped, so there will be no need to embarrass yourself by unfastening your pant button and unleashing your belly bulge. It'll all fit this year.
2405 Ocean, SF. (415) 334-2264

PEASANT PIES

With its top layer of apricot jelly and delicate homemade crust, Peasant's pumpkin pecan pie ($15.75, one-day advance notice necessary for ordering) will have you wishing Thanksgiving were a weeklong celebration. Peasant Pies' menu was inspired by the savory tarts found in Sète, France, and was designed with health-savvy pie eaters (is there such a thing?) in mind. Bon appétit!
1039 Irving, SF. (415) 731-1978, www.peasantpies.com

FAT APPLES

With its oh-so-desirable pumpkin pies available only through New Year's, the bakery recommends placing an advance order to get your paws on one. It also offers pecan pie and harvest pie (with apples, cranberries, and caramel strudel) during the holiday season (pumpkin and pecan, $17; harvest, $20). Now we really have something to be thankful for.
1346 Martin Luther King Jr., Berk. (510) 526-2260

BEARD PAPA'S SWEETS CAFE

Maybe you're the unpatriotic Scrooge who doesn't serve pie on Thanksgiving. Fair enough. But this year, dish up a few pumpkin-flavored cream puffs ($2.25 for one, $11 for six) to give off that I'm-a-reformer-who-still-has-a-little-spirit vibe. They're flaky on the outside, creamy on the inside, and lightly sprinkled with powdered sugar that will undoubtedly end up all over the place. It could be a fun new tradition.
845 Market, Suite FE 16, SF. (415) 978-9975, www.beardpapasf.com

YOUR KITCHEN

If you're really brave and have some time on your hands, be bold and bake a pie from real pumpkin, not the canned-puree stuff. To make the filling, follow this recipe from www.vitalitymagazine.com:

Cut the pumpkin in half with a French knife or cleaver.
Scoop out the seeds. (Set them aside for roasting or use them in another recipe.)
Brush the cut sides with 2 tablespoons of olive oil.
Place the pumpkin halves on a baking sheet, cut side down. Bake them in a 375-degree oven for about one hour, or until a knife pierces the skin and flesh easily.
Remove them from the oven and let them cool.
Scrape the flesh from the skin and puree it in a blender or a food processor. Use it immediately or freeze it in one-cup portions.
A three-pound pumpkin yields three cups of puree. SFBG

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For those whose music and style leans more Lil' Wayne than Wayne Coyne, try some of the goodies on our homeboy (or girl) hotlist.

1. Shadow plaid jacket ($325). HUF, 812 Sutter, SF. (415) 674-3744, www.hufsf.com; 2. SF Hat ($38). True Men's, 1415 Haight (415) 626-2882, www.trueclothing.net; 3. 5-panel cap ($34). HUF, 812 Sutter, SF. (415) 674-3744, www.hufsf.com; 4. Jeepney Akira jacket ($96). True Women's,1427 Haight, SF. (415) 626-2331, www.trueclothing.net; 5. Hellzbellz shirt ($38). True Women's,1427 Haight, SF. (415) 626-2331, www.trueclothing.net; 6. Hellzbellz jeans ($98). True Women's,1427 Haight, SF. (415) 626-2331, www.trueclothing.net; 7. Onitsuka Ultimate 81 ($72). Shoe Biz 2,1553 Haight, SF. (415) 861-3933, www.shoebizsf.com; 8. Buddah Apparel ($32). True Men's, 1415 Haight (415) 626-2882, www.trueclothing.net; 9. Revolver necklace ($28); Starry Eyed brass knuckles ($22). Hello Drama jewelry, www.hellodrama.net; 10. Supra Skytop ($130). Shoe Biz II, 1553 Haight, SF. (415) 861-3933, www.shoebizsf.com; 11. LRG Jeans ($74). True Men's, 1415 Haight (415) 626-2882, www.trueclothing.net; 12. Gold Coin "king coin" T-shirt ($37). D-Structure, 520 Haight, SF. (415) 252.8601, www.d-structure.com; 13. FTC Skatedeck ($36.95). FTC, 1632 Haight, SF. (415) 626-0663, www.ftcsf.com

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A holiday from the holidays

Spa ideas for the weary shopper or lucky gift-getter

By Chloe Schildhause
› culture@sfbg.com

The holiday season can tend to be less a time of respite and more of a stress fest, what with the cocktail parties, gift buying, feast cooking, and family madness. The best way to regroup during the holiday mess is to retreat to the spa. Or better yet, aid your loved ones by giving *them* the gift of relaxation. San Francisco has some superb spas, and all of them are waiting to untie those knots in your back and soothe the tension in your life. Lucky for you, I made the huge sacrifice of testing out some of the city's best to help you decide where to host your miniretreat.

If you're looking for an experience beyond the typical Western massage, try the ayurveda spa treatment at **Golden Green Spa** (685 North Point, SF. 415-441-0685), www.goldengreenspa.com). Though you can get a traditional Swedish or deep-tissue rubdown, I'd recommend the more spiritual option, which involves yogic breathing, meditation, and chanting a mantra. For something extraspecial, enjoy a Chocolate Massage with Indian transplant Mukth, who awakens your chakras through a breathing exercise and a chocolate-scented wrap. You'll leave feeling calm and rejuvenated — if a bit oily.

For full-on, daylong, princess-style luxury, my favorite is the Javanese *lulur* body treatment at **Kabuki Springs and Spa** (1750 Geary, SF. 415-922-6000, www.kabukisprings.com). Based on an Indonesian pre-wedding ritual for brides, it starts with relaxation in a communal bathing area. The massage itself involves ginger- and jasmine-scented oils, exfoliation, and a brush-down. Then you are doused with a bowl of hot water before stepping into a deep, warm, rose-petal-bestrewn bath. Brides of old used to get this treatment every day for 40 days before the marriage. If only we could do the same for ourselves every day until Christmas ...

There may be something med spa/glam hospital about the atmosphere at **Spa Radiance** (3011 Fillmore, SF. 415-346-6281, www.sparadiance.com), but there's no denying that the offerings are both diverse and delightful. I loved my Scent of the World massage, during which I was scrubbed with sea salts and allowed to relax in the warm embrace of a heat tent while getting a head massage. Next up was the Cacao facial, a hydrating and softening treatment. The creams and lotions



GUARDIAN ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN RENTERIA

used reminded me of Good and Plenties, Starbursts, and York Peppermint Patties — but, along with extractions, had the exact opposite effect on my skin.

For the glamazon, or simply someone who needs a full escape from the holiday madness, there's the **Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay** (1 Miramontes Point Road, Half Moon Bay. 650-712-7000, www.ritzcarlton.com), 40 minutes south of the city. This spa oasis offers a seasonal treat for November: the pumpkin body peel. First the skin is exfoliated and lathered in a creamy, pumpkin-scented enzyme formula. Next comes the overhead shower running back and forth over the body, like a yummy-smelling, soothing car wash for humans. Finally, the body is massaged with a pumpkin-scented shea butter. For those who don't want to smell like organic squash all day, the year-round signature treatment is the Make Today a Sundae Pedicure. As your legs and feet undergo an extensive treatment of scented scrubs such as peppermint lotion and a roasted-marshmallow foot mask, *you* indulge in an ice cream sundae, complete with a chocolate brownie and whipped cream. The whole ordeal will make you feel like Kevin McCallister (a.k.a. Macaulay Culkin) at the Plaza. The end result is a pretty polish and a satisfied stomach.

If it's a facial you want to give (or get!), you can't go wrong with the Tru02 facial at **Tru Spa** (750 Kearny, SF. 415-399-9700, www.truspa.com). Rachel is the go-to woman for this treatment, an extractor extraordinaire who leaves no blackheads behind — and expertly applies basil-scented lathers. Give the rest of your body some attention, too, with the adventurous and unique body scrub, the Sugar Daddy. This intense treatment takes place in the Rainforest Room, a cave-like space reminiscent of a set from that old Nickelodeon game show *Legends of the Hidden Temple*. First, sugary honey- and vanilla-scented scrubs are applied to your body. Then, after a gentle massage, the "cave" begins to fill with steam — and an intense rainstorm begins. Personally, I didn't dig the rainstorm so much; I felt like I was drowning in a hurricane. But if you're into water, go for it! For something more traditional, opt for the Full Monte, a two-hour massage treatment that includes a hair and scalp rub, a face mask, aromatherapy, a foot scrub, and just about everything else.

For a spa-plus-hangout experience, try **Nob Hill Spa at the Huntington Hotel** (1075 California, SF. 415-474-5400, www.huntingtonhotel.com). Before or between treatments, you and your friends can hang out in the hot tub, relax by the pool, eat off the divine spa menu, or enjoy the city view from the balcony. The ideal treatment for winter is the Sandalwood Body Scrub, featuring an organic honey-salt scrub from Hawaii, a shea butter finish, and an after-treatment treat of a chocolate truffle and herbal mint tea. Or make a real holiday of it and book a room at the hotel. Whoever gets this gift — whether friend, family member, or stressed-out inner self — will thank you. SFBG



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